

The University of Leeds

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2013-2014

Part A: General Information**Subject area and awards being examined**

Faculty / School of:	Biological Sciences
Subject(s):	Biosciences
Programme(s) / Module(s):	Bioscience Infection & Immunity
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MSc

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner**Completed report**

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards**Matters for Urgent Attention**

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

NONE

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

N/A

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

N/A

Standards

1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

In my view, the Masters in Bioscience degree programme is nicely balanced, based on a rigorous set of Aims and ILO which, if met, provide evidence of a level of academic achievement commensurate with the accepted UK standard of a Master of Science award. The structure of the programme provides both advanced course-work (above the standard of an undergraduate degree) and a high standard of research experience and training. On the whole, the content elements are appropriate for these ILO.

This assessment is equally apt for the particular elements I scrutinised in detail (Bioscience; Infection & Immunity) .

2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

Yes – this is certainly equivalent or better, in the case of the research component, than the expectations on MSc students at my own institution.

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

Assessment methods by and large assist students to meet the ILO, and adequately permit teaching staff to monitor progress towards these ILO. Arrangements such as spacing of deadlines, and cross-talk between subject teachers to spread deadlines, appear to have improved since 2012-2013, and students fed-back a general satisfaction with this aspect. Award classification was carried out in an open and professional manner, striking a reasonable balance between compassion and maintaining the value of a higher classification award (ie less valuable if everybody gets one!).

Quality of teaching and assessment methods are generally adequate or better to provide a fair yet discriminating judgement of individual students' performances.

One course-work module, **BIOL5253M Infectious Diseases**, did not appear to display the range of achievement of other modules. Virtually all students achieved Merit level, with a tight spread, suggesting assessment may not be very discriminating and thus potentially disadvantage the brightest students.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

Yes, achievement of individuals was adequately demonstrated across the course-work programme, in the poster presentations, and in their Project write-up and viva. It was clear to me as an examiner who the strong students were, and where higher classifications should be awarded. These better students were certainly the equal of Distinction students in our own MSc students here at <>.

As a cohort, if anything, I was surprised at the lack of any very weak students. The intake this year appeared generally very able.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

N/A

6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

There was evidence that some of the issues raised by the external examiners last year had been addressed – in particular improving the balance between introductory work in the first session to bring international students, in particular, up to speed on various subject areas, and the risk of boredom in UK students (and particularly U Leeds BSc graduates) leading to a degree of disengagement in first semester. This had been improved, and the students in my streams seemed mor content than the previous year's cohort on this issue.

The spacing of assessment deadline in semester 1 also seemed to have been improved, at least from the students' points of view.

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

This is a wonderful feature of the programme, and figures very highly in students' motivation to take this degree. Firstly, there is a clear emphasis on a solid proportion of the teaching being delivered by active researchers, but at the same time some lecturers, without substantial research portfolios, appear to be highly professional teachers much appreciated by the students. This balance so that research leads, but does not dominate to the detriment of teaching excellence, is an important feature of the course which I hope will be maintained.

Secondly, the quality of project supervision, and the diversity and sophistication of the projects on offer is very high. Students rate this aspect very highly.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

N/A

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

I was asked to be a mentor this year, and have been in contact with my mentee by email. Unfortunately, neither of us understood (and perhaps I should have been more pro-active on this) that we were not in the same programme, and therefore did not see each other in the course of our two visits to Leeds (these were at different times, which I only realised afterwards).

I would recommend that the University provide both mentee and mentor with each other's visit timetables, to facilitate direct contact. We have agreed to debrief on our experience, to perhaps assist my mentee in <> role next year.

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.

Yes, this was perfectly adequate, although the student feedback data was only received very late in the process, due to some hold-up in processing somewhere in the Faculty, I believe. Student feedback should be available for externals prior, or at least at the very start of, their visit.

11. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?

The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

Yes, this was perfectly adequate, and much easier to understand in second year, than in my first year (due to experience, and good mentoring I had received in 2013).

12. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

N/A. Ours is a course-work / project based assessment degree.

13. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes.

14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Yes – excellent choice, and the assessment procedures pretty robust and professional. I did find this year that there was quite a bit of variation in the diligence with which project markers filled in and submitted their marking sheets. E.g. for some research dissertations, there was only one filled out viva report (usually from the supervisor). It would be good if this could be checked next year.

15. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

The Board was well-run, and all externals were present at the meeting. I was satisfied with the decisions made, and with the recommendations passed to Faculty.

16. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

Yes – and there was an example of such a candidate in the cohort.

Other comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form

I was impressed not only that last year's high standards were maintained, but that the team had obviously considered recommendations from last year and made improvements in a couple of areas.

**Faculty of Biological Sciences
Student Education Service**

Student Education Office
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Leeds
LS2 9JT, UK



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

27 November 2014

Dear

**RESPONSE TO EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2013/14:
MSc Infection and Immunity
MSc Bioscience**

Thank you for your report and for the generally very positive comments on our programmes. Your report highlighted a few issues for consideration, and I outline our responses below:

1. *One course-work module, **BIOL5253M Infectious Diseases**, did not appear to display the range of achievement of other modules. Virtually all students achieved Merit level, with a tight spread, suggesting assessment may not be very discriminating and thus potentially disadvantage the brightest students.*

We acknowledge that this module may not provide the appropriate level of discrimination between differing abilities and will reassess this for the coming year. However, this may also be influenced by the fact that, as you commented, this was a very strong cohort of students.

2. *I would recommend that the University provide both mentee and mentor with each other's visit timetables, to facilitate direct contact.*

We will ensure that in the future we facilitate this direct contact.

3. *.....the student feedback data was only received very late in the process, due to some hold-up in processing somewhere in the Faculty, I believe. Student feedback should be available for Externals prior, or at least at the very start of, their visit.*

We will ensure that this feedback data will be provided to the External Examiners in good time before their visit.

4. *I did find this year that there was quite a bit of variation in the diligence with which project markers filled in and submitted their marking sheets. e.g. for some research dissertations, there was only one filled out viva report (usually from the supervisor). It would be good if this could be checked next year.*

This is an issue that we have been aware of and will take measures to ensure that all viva reports are completed and made available to the External Examiners and the Examinations Board as required.

Yours sincerely,

Faculty Director of Student Education